

THOMAS (T. G.)

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

NEW YORK ORTHOPAEDIC DISPENSARY ^{AND} HOSPITAL,

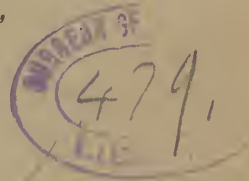
ON THE OCCASION OF ITS

TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY,

December 10th, 1891,

BY

T. GAILLARD THOMAS, M. D.



AN ADDRESS.

TRUSTEES OF THE NEW YORK ORTHOPÆDIC DISPENSARY AND HOSPITAL, AND LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, who have assembled to do honor to the twenty-fifth anniversary of that institution :

It needs no prophet's power to foretell that the little Dutch town of New Amsterdam, so lately founded, so recently limited by the confines of Wall Street, and having Canal Street as an outlying suburb, is destined soon to outstrip the cities of the world and to become the metropolis of the universe! Drawing inspiration from her more ancient sisters in all that belongs to advancing civilization, and incorporating into her being all which they have taught her, she turns upon them with a friendly and confident smile and says to them, in the language of Shylock, "it shall go hard, but I will better the instruction."

Holding her own in the front ranks of literature, arts and manufactures, she may, in the future, leave to her competitors the proud titles which record their fancied pre-eminence in these; while she chooses one, which the last quarter of a century proves that she well deserves,—
"The city of noble charities."

Forty years ago it was my good fortune to exchange a small Southern city for this metropolis as a home. Most wonderful is the change which these forty years have effected in the charities of New York! At that time but three or four general hospitals existed; dispensaries were



few in number, small and inefficient; and only one special hospital had been founded. To-day, the number of hospitals, general and special; of homes; asylums; retreats; institutes; infirmaries; dispensaries; and maternities; supported by all the creeds known to theology, and devoted all to the noble cause of charity, is so great that a mere enumeration of them would be too tedious for accomplishment; a mere recollection of them too difficult an effort for the memory!

At that time the suffering poor were carried to the institutions of the period in hired hacks, received by vulgar, coarse women, and most unprepossessing men, who acted as nurses, and excluded from the general sympathy of the outside world as if they had "left hope behind." To-day, the comfortable ambulance, with its attentive surgeon, bears the patient to his bright, well-ventilated, and cheerful temporary home; a professional nurse receives him, and the sick one is cheered by the sympathy and kindness of the good women of the city, whose only reward is to hear in the future the words, "I was sick and ye visited me."

During this period, forty years (oh, how short the time seems to me now as I look back upon it), a still more wonderful change has been effected. Men and women of wealth have suddenly awakened to the great idea that property is a loan, not a gift, to its possessor; that it has its duties and responsibilities; that its so-called owner must, in its administration, be mindful of the fact that a bounden duty which attaches to it is to use it for the lasting good of others, and not like a niggard, a miser, or a spendthrift, for the sole enjoyment of himself and his own immediate surroundings. During this time millions, not thousands, have been given for the ends of charity, not only as legacies, but as gifts during the lives of the givers, with lavish hand. The income of a prince is bestowed by

one to found a general hospital; a king's ransom by another to create a maternity, or lying-in hospital; the fortunes dreamed of and striven for by thousands and millions of avaricious money seekers, by still another for the construction of offices for the transaction of the business connected with public charities.

Was ever such an era known in the world's history? Was ever city made so illustrious by the surpassing generosity of its sons and daughters as this "City of noble charities"; the whilom town of New Amsterdam; the present city of New York? This age must surely be, in this respect, its golden period, its Augustan age in charity; for so great has been the development of the past forty years that no other can ever compete with it.

And in the time to come, when the recording angel shall read the names of those who so loved their fellow men as to do for them what the last half century has witnessed in this city, surely no names will follow more closely after that of Abou Ben Adhem; than those of Lenox and of Roosevelt; of Vanderbilt and of Sloane; of Astor and of Cullum; of Baldwin and of Kennedy; and of many others, the mere mention of which is rendered impossible by their numbers.

Nowadays, no address is considered classic without a reference to Greece and Rome as representatives of a brilliant, bygone civilization. Right willingly do we make reference to them here; right gladly meet them in the field of comparison. The poets, the historians, and the dramatists of those ancient times are eager to extol the generous deeds of their patrons, and the lordly gifts of their princes. We read of noble gifts to art; of generous aid to the struggling votaries of science; of the founding of luxurious baths for the poor; and of the construction of spacious circuses and theatres for the enjoyment of the masses. But where do we read of what I have recorded here to-day; of immense

sums of money given for the relief of the sick and suffering poor; of fortunes expended even during the donor's lifetime that the humblest of God's creatures might by their use be made happier?

And the end of all this noble lavishness of wealth; of this devotion of millions to the great and lovely work of charity; of this hitherto unheard of extravagance of generosity, what is it to be? Surely the end has not come yet, for the spirit is still abroad in the land. Let me illustrate my appreciation of this spirit in the following manner. We have with us to-day two dignitaries of the church who are beloved for their personal characters, admired for their ability, and honored for their signal success. Let either of these men rise in the pulpit three days hence, and calmly make a statement that he wished that ten men of his audience would, as a personal favor to him, make up among themselves the sum of half a million of dollars, to be used for a special and important work of charity, and I feel morally sure that within ten days the request would be gratified. This is my reading of the spirit of the age in the City of New York to-day. That you agree with me, that you endorse my postulate, I read in your faces. The end is not yet! What will it be? In my judgment a new power has been set in motion; a new era has been born; a new moral lever has been created, which will do more to establish a healthy relation between poverty and riches, between *'oi aristoi* and *'oi polloi*, the rich men and the poor men of the earth, than kings with their standing armies; kaisers with their police and their jails; and czars with their torture chambers and their cruel knouts, have ever dreamed of accomplishing. The day of brute force, of savage punishments, of intimidation, and of brow-beating are fast passing away. The days of moral suasion, of education of the masses, of human sympathy, are beginning to replace them. And so surely as the ways of the

good God surpass in wisdom and power those of the cruel devil, the experiment of to-day will surpass the methods of the olden time.

During the eventful period to which I have so frequently alluded, special hospitals for diseases of the nose and throat; lungs and heart; skin; brain and nerves; eye and ear; diseases of women; cancerous affections; and many others have been established upon secure and permanent basis. But still there was one fallow field which remained neglected and overlooked. As one passed through the poorer wards of the city, boys and girls, small, haggard, weakly, and more or less deformed, could be constantly seen limping about, sorrowful emblems of aborted usefulness, and of strength nipped in the bud. They were not the objects of much attention, for they were not sick; nor of much sympathy, because, like dwarfed plants which slink into the shady recesses of the forest, they kept out of sight. Still, their number was large, for the factors which create deformity in childhood, poor food and neglect; blows from a drunken parent; falls down a dark stairway; injuries in street fights, or from passing vehicles, are numerous in the haunts of poverty.

Think for a moment what an army of mendicants was being organized in these little recruits, who by their ailments were incapacitated for work. How large a cohort of missionaries for the devil and his works was being reared in these poor little sinners, to whom idleness was compulsory, and bad habits almost an essential of existence. The evil was great, not alone for these poor, deformed, wretched children, who, born to poverty and hard work, were doomed to the one without the possibility of mitigating it by the other, but to their families and friends; to the neighborhood which was to be for a generation cursed by their presence; and even to the city itself, which was to be the scene of their future gypsy habits of mendicancy

and the usual accompaniments of the gypsy existence. The evil was great and clamored for palliation!

Just a quarter of a century ago, this hospital, the history of which has already been given to you, was founded to meet this great need; and wonderful has been the result which it has attained; grand and imposing the effect which it has accomplished. Penetrating the tenement houses of Elizabeth, Water, Willett, Mott, and other streets, where, in squalid wretchedness, these waifs of society exist, like sickly flowers growing in the shade of the upas tree, the emissaries of this hospital have sought out the sufferers; its surgeons have by operations to a certain extent relieved them; and then by months of labor with mechanical appliances and manipulations, restored them to health, and to capacity for labor.

Who can tell how many of the halt and the lame have, during the last twenty-five years, been by these devoted workers restored to lives of labor and of usefulness; how many human beings, previously soured by the sense of deformity, have had light shed upon their lives; and how many warped and poisoned intellects, ready for the work of sin, have been turned to better ways in life.

Such work as this, truly makes life worth living, not only for the sufferer, but for the benefactor; for "it blesses him that gives and him that takes." But this is by no means all that is accomplished by it. The entrance of a cheerful, kindly, genial presence to such a sad and darkened abode, soon leads the patient and his family to recognize the truth, that the mere isolated fact that a man is possessed of wealth does not necessarily make him a selfish brute who despises his poor neighbor, and loves to trample upon him.

Then when the sufferer has been removed to the pleasant wards of this hospital, felt the genial influence of woman's sympathy, and experienced the soothing effects of kind-

ness and of care; when he gradually sees his club foot disappear and a comely member takes its place; the cripple begins to admit that the dicta of the communist to whom he has listened in his wretched home are to a certain extent, at least, false and libellous. And, later still, when he recognizes that, without cost, merely for the love of God and their fellow men, his benefactors have made a working machine of his once useless body; swept away the cobwebs of prejudice and animosity from his mind; and sowed in his heart the seeds of respect, if not of friendship, for his richer neighbors, he acknowledges with gratitude that a great change for the better has come over him both as a man and as a citizen.

This is the moral lever to which I have alluded; this the power for good, greater than the jail, the knout, or the guillotine; this the factor, which I have ventured to predict, will inaugurate a new era in changing the relations of the classes.

All honor to those who have placed this Dispensary and Hospital at the disposal of society for the furtherance of this great work!

In very obscure and complicated legal cases, in which great wickedness has been displayed by men, our Gallic neighbors declare that this rule should always be followed in unravelling the mystery,—“*cherchez la femme.*” A woman is always at the bottom of the evil. There is probably great truth in the formula, but the converse is equally true. Where any great effort has been made for charity, however men may appear upon the surface, trying to get the lion's share of credit,—“*cherchez les femmes,*” and you will find that woman is always at the bottom of the good work. The case before us to-day sustains this assertion. Mindful of the French adage, I have sought for the woman who after bearing the brunt of twenty-five years of labor and of anxiety, stand aside to-day, like “the wee,

modest daisy," permitting the men to overshadow them.

Ask me not publicly to proclaim the names of these good and devoted lovers of their kind, for little do these women crave of notoriety or display. But look, and you may read them for yourselves in the grateful faces of those who owe them health; listen, and you will hear them whispered in their prayers!

But is it really true, you will ask, that no monumental tablet has been raised upon these walls in memory of their faithful services? As the stranger wanders through the grand cathedral of St. Pauls, of London, he looks in vain for monument or tablet placed within it to the glory of its great architect. As he continues to prosecute his fruitless search, he discovers in time, over a small and obscure doorway, cut deep in the solid granite wall, the name of Christopher Wren, and under it this simple legend: "*Si monumentum requiris, circumspice.*" "If you seek a monument, look around you."

Through life's rough and trying journey may their loving care for these unfortunate children bring to them as reward, comfort and peace! As they cross the dark and silent river, and ascend the purple hills beyond, may it add warmth to the greeting of the angelic chorus, "singing to welcome the pilgrims of the night!"

